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United States Senate

August 12, 2015

The Honorable Gina McCarthy
Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator McCarthy,

I write to express serious concern about the Gold King Mine spill and obtain information on how the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) intends to address the spill's impact on communities in northern Arizona. All reports on the spill indicate that individuals with the EPA were responsible for breaching the tailing ponds at the Gold King Mine near Silverton, Colorado, which released about 3 million gallons of toxic wastewater with high levels of mercury, cadmium, arsenic, lead, and other substances into the Animus River. Ultimately, these substances have the potential to flow into the Colorado River via the San Juan River on the Navajo Nation and possibly settle in Lake Powell. Justifiably, a number of my constituents in northern Arizona have been alarmed by the spill's potential impact on public health and outdoor recreation. The Navajo Nation and Coconino County, in particular, are depending on your agency to provide its full support and transparency until they are satisfied there is no longer a public health risk, and all affected communities expect that the federal government's monitoring and cleanup of the Gold King Mine spill will be made a national priority.

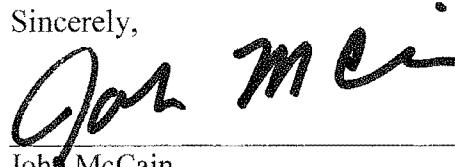
Given the serious and urgent nature of this situation, I ask you to provide answers to the following questions:

1. What caused this environmental casualty, who was responsible for causing it, and how will those persons be held accountable?
2. What safeguards will be put in place to make sure that spills like this never happen again?
3. What is your current estimate of how much wastewater has been released from the mine site?
4. What is your current assessment of the full scale of the spill's environmental and economic impact?
 - a. Specifically, what is the risk of contamination to Arizona's groundwater supplies, including the pumping of groundwater that might draw from an impacted waterway?
 - b. And, what impact could the spill have on the operations of the Glen Canyon Dam or to recreation in the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area?

5. What actions will the EPA take to monitor and restore water quality in the affected areas? Regarding those actions, what cost will be borne by the EPA, as opposed to the Navajo Nation or the State of Arizona?
6. What resources will be made available to the citizens of affected northern Arizona communities to mitigate the environmental and economic impact of the spill on their communities?

Thank you for your attention to this serious matter.

Sincerely,



John McCain
United States Senator